might be, "If these are 'hand-painted,' I will take something that is not." When allured by the bewildering displays in some of our poorly-lighted shops it is well to cultivate a righteous aversion to trash.

Amateur Photography.

CONDUCTED BY GEORGE C. ROCKWOOD.

BACKGROUNDS IN PORTRAITURE.—A correspondent writes: "What would be the best general background for portraits? I have no room to store a number of canvases of different shades." Although I have, probably, over forty backgrounds and combinations, one suffices for nine tenths of my portrait-heads. The ground is 5x7 feet, of a light cool gray color painted in distemper, and, of course, perfectly "flat." Oil colors would be desirable if it were not for the gloss or reflections which they give out in certain lights. Flannel sheeting dyed a pale gray is excellent and does not dent like the distemper-printed ground. It is, of course, put on a stretcher which hangs on pivots—precisely like the dressing-mirrors in use. By this means one is enabled to change the tone of the background to any degree desired by simply tipping the ground forward or back. If pushed back at the top to an angle of, say, 25 or 30° the result is almost white; when reversed, of course, the ground goes into shadow and the result is a dark ground. With a swinging leaf or side-screen hinged to the upright sides of the frame the ground can be made still darker. It will be readily seen that every possible grade can thus be produced and an atmosphere produced about the head which would be difficult to obtain otherwise. Ordinarily I place my sitter in the light which I consider best for likeness and artistic effect, then secure the desired contrast of background by swinging or tipping the screen to the proper degree. In this study of backgrounds or relief I can quite appreciate the point of the old story concerning Sir Thomas Lawrence, which, in effect, was that the father of a young art student sought a position for him in the studio of the great painter, declaring that he might earn his salt, perhaps, by painting in backgrounds. Sir Thomas replied that he who could paint his backgrounds would be able to finish the pictures. The photographic fraternity, I think, is much indebted to Mr. Sarony for first emphasizing the great value of strong lighting and effective contrasts in backgrounds and sitters.

AN INEXPENSIVE METHOD OF PROVING NEGATIVES by those who have limited, or no means, of printing, is to make transparencies from them. Simple as is this process of printing by contact, I find that some of our amateur friends are not succeeding as well as one might expect. The transparencies may be made the same size as the negatives, or they may be larger or smaller. An ordinary printing-press the size of the negative is desirable, although not essential. A series of black paper mats with various-sized, and different-shaped, openings should be provided. The material used for them is usually known as "needle" paper. It is thin, smooth, and opaque enough to protect the margins of the plate. For portraits, an oval shape is best; for landscapes, the square or double elliptic. After thoroughly cleaning the back of the negative, place it in the press, and then upon this adjust the opening of the mat, so as to expose the choice portion of the picture. It may be best to fasten the mat to the negative or press with sticking paper. Now place your unexposed plate face down upon the mat, and over this either black paper or dark cloth, so that no light be reflected. Be most careful that no light reaches your plate. Now, at a distance of, say, two feet, rest your press, and with your watch in hand open the door of the dark-room lantern. The exposure, of course, will depend upon the density of the negative and the power of the light. In my own practice I use the *same distance* and *same light* for all negatives, so that I may have a standard, and vary the time of exposure with the density of the negatives. At the distance named, and with a four-foot burner, a reasonable margin is given for timing the picture, which, with a good, bright negative requires about ten seconds. Nothing will take the place of experience in timing, so one must make some experiments before feeling certain about exposures. But there is quite as much lee-way in developing transparencies as in negatives, and the same methods used in negative development will give good results with positives. Of course the best color is obtained with oxalate, and the solution of bromide should be used if there is the least indication of over-exposure. The development should not be carried to the extent that negatives are: simply till the lights are well covered. Fixing and washing should be done with the same care as with negatives. If enlargements or reductions are wanted, a long cone or box should be provided, into which your camera will slide. Say, for instance, that the camera-box is 8x8 on the outside. Provide a plain wooden tube 9x9 on the inside, and, say, twenty-four inches long. One end, of course, is open, and the other end is arranged with adjustable apertures the size of the negative to be copied. Brass springs or "fingers" will hold the latter in place. Having adjusted the negative turn it toward a clear, uninterrupted light—northern sky light preferred—and run the camera into the dark tube until the image on the ground glass is the size required; then focus, expose and develop in the usual manner. If the camera has sufficient bellows length the image, of course, may be enlarged if so desired. I have often reproduced card and cabinet negatives in this manner to nearly life size with excellent results. In the case of small transparencies suitable frames can be had of the stock dealers; or, failing these, a sheet of glass of the size of the picture may be covered with ground glass varnish—a formula for which has been published in these columns—and placed face to face with the transparency and bound with sticking paper. Amateurs will find this an admirable method of proving their negatives, and, after all, it is not much more expensive than getting the prints made; and then one has the satisfaction of assuring one's friends that "I did it!"

PAINTING ON BROMIDE PAPER.—An artist friend asks how to prepare the bromide paper for painting on it in oil colors. The vehicle for holding the sensitive compound on the paper is an emulsion of gelatine, and this, of course, is a "size" itself—so, I have found that where the image well covered the strainer the paint would "bear out" without any preparation. But it is safest to apply to the surface a sizing of good clear glue or gelatine, being careful to put it on very smoothly and *not too hot* as it might dissolve away the picture. Of course the picture should be mounted on good strong muslin. I find that sold as "night-gown" muslin is best for the purpose; it has large, smooth threads and gives the effect of canvas.

REMOVING PHOTOGRAPHS FROM MOUNTS.—"A traveller" wishes to remove the photographs gathered in foreign lands from their mounts and paste them in scrap-books. Let him carefully split the mounts, and remove from the backs all that is possible without injury to the picture; then place them in a pan of hot water and be *patient!* In a few minutes most of the photographs will lift easily from the mounts, while others will require a second or third Turkish bath before leaving the cardboard. Do not undertake to remount carbon prints as the hot water will be likely to dissolve away the picture entirely!

STEREOSCOPIC PICTURES WITH ONE LENS.—Nothing is more simple than making a stereoscopic picture with one lens if the objects before the lens can remain in position. Say with a 5x4 lens, box and plate you make an exposure. Have your box so that you can slide or move it directly to the right or left, but exactly in horizontal line, two and five eighths inches—never more than three inches—and make on another plate the same picture with the same exposure. Be sure that there is the same extent of picture in each. For instance, you may have a landscape with a tree or any other object, which is half an inch from the left side of the picture; in the second exposure see to it that the tree or object occupies the same relative position on the ground glass. After development and printing, the pictures must be *reversed* in mounting, the centres not to exceed two and five eighths of an inch apart. If the latter distance is exceeded there will be a painful effect upon the eyes, and a distortion in the picture. I mean by "centres," of course, the distance from any given line or object in one picture to the same object in the other.

DEFECTIVELY MOUNTED LENSES.—Speaking of this matter of distance between centres in mounting and of the difference in the sizes of the photographs, I feel confident that the marvellous pictures of the stereoscope have fallen into disuse more from this tendency to exaggeration, than from any other cause. Even the lens-makers have overlooked the fault. Recently, upon applying to Dallmeyer, in London, for a set of portrait stereoscopic lenses, he furnished them to me on flanges which brought the centres of the tubes full four inches apart. I called his attention to the defect and he admitted it, but it was too late to alter them before my sailing. I tried the lenses, as he had mounted them, and the results were curious, to say the least. A child's head presented a chin not less than one foot long; and other features were proportionately exaggerated. I removed or cut down the flanges until the distance between the centres was that of the ordinary distance between the pupils of the human eye, and, after that, the pictures no longer showed distortions.

THREE IN ONE.—It is not generally known by photographers that all of the double combination lenses of the best manufacture can be transformed into three separate lenses of varying focus and power—first, the regular combination; then each of the single lenses separately. There is usually a difference in focus between the front and the back lens, so, when adjusted—always in the *back* end of the tube—the image varies in size. If the two lenses vary in diameter, the tube must be altered so that each will screw in, or a special brass work is procured for the non-fitting lens. In using either of the components as a single lens the stop should be placed in front, or next to the concave side of the glass. Of course the *front* lens when so used should be reversed; that is, the convex side to the plate, and the concave or plane side to the object. The single lens will not give good definition with so large an aperture to the stop as in the complete combination. The successful experiment has been made of combining the front lens of a short focus combination, say four-inch equivalent focus, with the back lens of a nine-inch, securing a result of about six or seven-inch focus. In such a case the stop should be placed nearest to the short focused lens.

AS TO THE PERMANENCE OF PLATINUM PRINTS.—An admirer of the beautiful prints made by the platinum process, asks if they are permanent. This is a question somewhat difficult to answer, for while, theoretically and "officially," the platinum picture is declared to be unalterable, my experience is to the contrary. I was the first "licensee" of the process in America, and was delighted at the charming results obtained by its use; but all of my pictures have proved first or last unstable—all turning a yellow or dingy red. Possibly, with great care, small pictures may, in limited quantities, be so treated as to be made permanent; but I fear that large prints are too unstable to be used for portraits to be finished in crayon. My present belief is that a *developed print*, by the silver process, is the most permanent form of all photographic prints aside from the carbon or pigment printing processes. I have a number of developed prints, made twenty years ago, which have been exposed to all sorts of atmospheric changes and yet give no sign of fading orchanging.

SUGGESTION FOR FAN DECORATION.